

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES

April 12, 2007

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Elsie Fetterman, Ed Kaler, Rosemary Kofler, Tom McAuley, Barbara Sutherland, David Yaukey

Absent: Doris Holden, Susan Whitbourne

Select Board Liaison: absent

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Marlene Barnett (Program Coordinator)

Guests: Al Byam, Nicole Rohan, Janet Shaw, Marge Babb, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager)

Welcome:

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:09 AM.

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

David recommended a change in wording to the Independent Transportation Network notes. The minutes were accepted as amended.

Senior Trust Treasurer's Report:

In her absence, Doris provided a handout of the month's activities. A total of \$150.13 was received. There were no disbursements. The report was approved and accepted.

NEW BUSINESS

Meet new PVT Director of Transportation – Nicole Rohan:

Guest and former COA member, **Al Byam**, introduced **Nicole Rohan**. Nicole, who began in February, 2007, explained her role as overseeing the fixed route of PVT, the paratransit service and the claims department. She comes with 14 years of experience with paratransit service in Worcester. Following the recent termination of the contract with MV van services, Nicole will help with the transition to the new company, First Transit. Her charge is to provide outreach to the current riders who have had so many problems with MV and get their input, to make clear PVT policies and issues, and to get feedback from all advocacy agencies such as Stavros and the COA to determine what the needs are. First Transit will begin service in seven weeks - the end of May. Nicole's goal is to make the transition as smooth as possible. First Transit is coming next week to begin driver training. All vans will have GPS units and there will be periodic "secret riders" with disabilities on the vans to report on the service. MV has agreed to cooperate with the transition. Nicole and Al assured COA members that First Transit has a very good reputation. They provide service in NYC (18,000 trips/day) and Denver (12,000 trips/day) as well as many other cities.

Dan expressed appreciation to Ed and Nancy for all their hard work in helping to solve the transportation crisis for our seniors and the disabled. Nancy in turn thanked Dan and other COA members for their help with giving rides and answering the phones during the difficult period.

Ed proceeded to discuss the **MV Transportation** issues. He mentioned the terrific grass roots committee and disabilities law center, which worked to end the MV crisis. MV contract terminates the end of May. First Transit will start with a 2-year contract. They will handle the overall contract, the centralized call center, and the scheduling. They will sub-contract with paratransit providers for van service. About one half of those providers must be local, such as Hulmes Transportation. Driver pay rates will be higher than with MV. Performance measures and penalties are also part of the contract – related to on time performance, missed trips, being kept on the van longer than 1 hour, phone calls not responded to appropriately, etc. There will be a new phone system. It will be automated. Several COA members expressed concern about the difficulties that many seniors have with automated phones. Nicole said the request call would come into First Transit. The night before the trip the sub-contracting company that will provide the ride will call the client to confirm pickup time. Phone training will be provided for First Transit and the sub-contractors. There will be a safety training coordinator for drivers. The PVT complaint number will be widely advertised.

Ed expressed appreciation that Nicole is part of this process. He is pleased that the ridership now feels attended to by PVTa and that the process does not have to go to litigation.

Volunteer Recognition Event:

Nancy announced the date of the annual event - Friday, June 29th at 1:30 PM. Pat Romney, Clinical and Consulting Psychologist, will speak on Positive Psychology. The recipients being considered for the Eveline Sears Senior Activist Award are Dona Motts, who volunteers her time three times a week to lead fitness classes at the Senior Center, and Parvin Niroomand, who has been responsible for many successful fundraisers for the Senior Center. It was moved, seconded and approved unanimously that Dona Motts and Parvin Niroomand be recipients of the Eveline Sears Award for 2007.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Counseling Center:

Maura reported that the Center is moving along. They are still learning the best way to provide services to the elders and resolve the conflict in schedules between when the funding comes in and when and the students begin. They are in the process of hiring a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker. Maura has received a few calls from seniors interested in counseling services in response to the Senior Spirit article.

Nursing Center Update:

Rosemary, member of the Senior Health Advisory Group, reported that despite the abrupt closing of the Nursing Center in January, the Group agreed that they want to remain committed to seeing that seniors have access to health care at the Senior Center. They are willing to participate in re-establishing the Nursing Center and serving in an advisory capacity. They feel the responsibility for the operation and supervision belongs to the Senior Center, the COA and the Town Manager. Who will supervise the nurse is still unclear. The Group is developing an ad for the nursing position. They are also working on updating the job description and mission statement. Recently the Group submitted a grant request to Cooley Dickinson Hospital for \$5000 to increase the nursing hours and enable the nurse to do outreach work and visit homebound seniors in their homes. They will explore using UMass nursing students to work with the nurse 3 hours each week. The Amherst Health Department has obtained the key to the Nursing Center cabinet but no patient charts were found. The Bubble Room will be re-carpeted, re-furnished and hopefully re-opened in the fall.

Parking:

Ed explained that the parking issue, which he began researching one year ago, was put on hold. A death in the family and the PVTa MV crisis took priority. In review: there were complaints about availability of parking near the Senior Center, feeding meters, and the cost of parking for low income elders. Ed had met with the parking committee, Gerry Weiss and the Town Manager. The next step is to meet with the Selectboard. Ed has been a committee of one. He needs help from another COA member to continue this project. It was decided to table the parking issue since the main focus of the SB and Town Meeting for now is the override issue.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Comprehensive Planning Committee:

Rosemary reported that about 150 people attended Community Choices on March 29. Each of the seven Work Groups presented their goals. The attendants registered their overwhelming support for and comments about the goals and the Land Use Principles. The Work Groups will evaluate the comments and look at conflicting Objectives among all Work Group Objectives. They will then proceed to develop Strategies – ways on how to implement the Objectives. A Survey is being developed and will be mailed to about 1700 residents to get their feedback on their priorities for town planning ideas. Another community meeting will be held in June.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Elsie reported. There was a speaker from Protective Services talking about elder caregivers. Many people hire less expensive non-agency caregivers to avoid paying extra money to an agency. There is concern about those caregivers not having CORI checks. Sometime in the past two years a caregiver murdered an elder woman in

Westfield. HVES will begin educating elders about the availability of CORI checks, in which an individual's in-state criminal record is investigated. Agencies can also get an out of state criminal record. Nancy is certified by the state to do CORI checks. She does so with all people involved with personal contact with seniors.

COA STAFF REPORTS

Senior Spirit Postage:

Nancy reported that postage costs for the Senior Spirit might go down even though postal rates in general will increase soon. The Amherst Woman's Club made a contribution of \$200 to the Senior Spirit and there were several individual contributions following an announcement in the last newsletter.

Budget:

Proposed cuts for Marlene's hours (\$13,296), office supplies (\$250) and Senior Center Activities (\$250) remain the same. Marlene's salary reduction was on the Town Manager's original A List for restoration, but since the TM revised the A List that has been dropped. Nancy proposed a formal discussion at next month's meeting about the suggestion Gerry Weiss made last month – to use \$13,296 from the Trust fund to pay Marlene. One concern is that it sets a precedent for succeeding years. We only have about \$80,000 in that fund.

Nancy will continue to press Deb Jankowski to complete the Friends paperwork, which will then allow fundraising activities.

Senior Center Space:

The Community Development Block Grant will provide money to make physical changes to the entrance to the office to accommodate people with disabilities. The doorway has a hump, which makes it difficult for wheelchairs to enter. The doorway also needs to be widened. Nancy has contracted with Whalen to alter the design of the desk to aid in greeting and talking with those in wheelchairs.

Nominating Committee:

At the May COA meeting, a nominating committee will be formed to approach those with expiring terms and ask them to consider re-appointment.

Tax Work-off Program:

Maura, Nancy, David Burgess and Larry Shaffer worked to increase the income guidelines for eligibility to participate in the tax work-off program. The new guidelines, based on towns similar to Amherst, are \$36,531 for an individual or \$54,797 for a couple. There are 30 slots available with a wide range of skills. Positions are posted on the Town website.

Nancy said the meal delivery problem in Pelham remains unresolved. Even more Pelham elders have signed up. Delivery routes have been readjusted until Pelham residents come forward to help out.

Nancy expressed to Larry Shaffer her concern that Marlene's hours may not be restored even with an override. Larry said the financial crisis is a real problem and cuts will be necessary across the board, affecting every department. No one is being singled out. If the override does not pass, they will try again with a lesser amount. If that fails, they will have to go back to the original, more drastic cuts. Recreation and Human Services are the most vulnerable; fire, police and DPW are least vulnerable. There just is not enough revenue to support the services that we presently provide. The override is needed. Amherst has spent its savings for years and there is no longer money left for that. Amherst has a long-term problem of inadequate revenue generation.

The COA meeting was adjourned at 10:55 AM

The next meeting will be held on May 10, 2007 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary